

S 378

Lincoln the Christian

By

GEORGE SHAW COOK

and

Lincoln's Gettysburg
Address

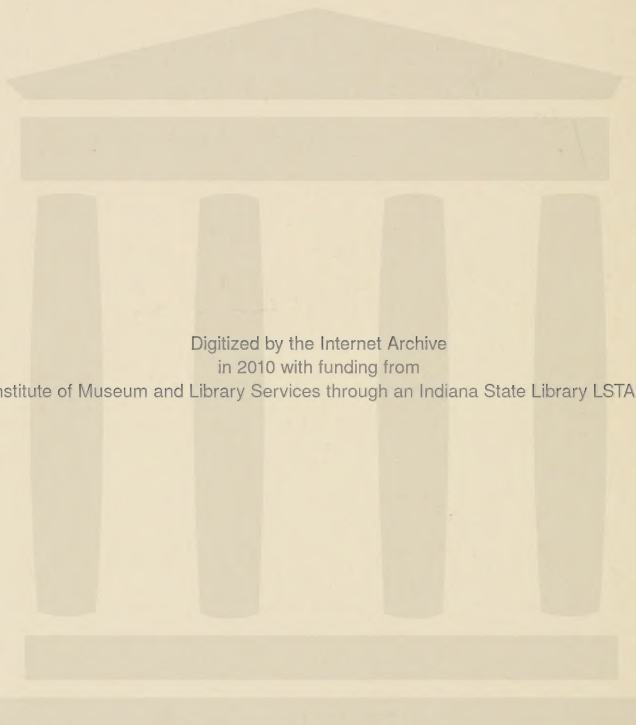
Lincoln the Christian

An Address delivered at the Lincoln Day
Service, February 12, 1910, in
Third Church of Christ, Scientist, of Chicago

By
GEORGE SHAW COOK

Christian Science Committee on Publication
for the State of Illinois

Published with consent of Mr. Cook
by Board of Directors of
Third Church of Christ, Scientist, Chicago



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from

The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant

Ladies and Gentlemen:

When I was invited to make a short address at this Lincoln Day service, I accepted the invitation with gratitude, but with some misgivings. My gratitude was for the opportunity of rendering a loving service to the officers and members of this Church, and at the same time paying a modest tribute to the man in whose honor we are met here today. My misgivings were due to a sense of unfitness for the task which gratitude impelled me to undertake. However, I am learning that one may do whatever it is right for him to do, provided he will but turn to the right source for inspiration and strength.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN THE CHRISTIAN

Having come upon the scene of earth's activities since the close of the Civil War, I am, as a matter of course, devoid of personal reminiscences of the meek but mighty man whose life work we are commemorating at

this service. Silver-haired men and women there are in this city—and, for aught, I know, in this audience—the storehouses of whose memory are filled with rich recollections of the 'fifties and early 'sixties in Illinois. Some of these, no doubt, felt the cordial hand clasp and enjoyed the genial smile of Abraham Lincoln while he was yet known only as a rising lawyer of the Prairie State. Some there may be still among us who can recall the grim visage and almost grotesque figure of the "Martyr President," as he went sadly about the national capital, bearing the unspeakable burden of care and responsibility which he assumed on becoming Chief Executive. There are some venerable patriots still in our midst who fought for the preservation of the Union under Lincoln's direction; for, by virtue of the presidential office, he was Commander-in-Chief of the Armies and Navies of the United States. But it is not for me to open these treasure houses of memory, and, perhaps, it is better so. For while the personal appearance, habits, manner of dress, the tone of

voice, may engage the attention and interest us at the moment of personal contact, these merely human attributes do not survive the wreck of time. It is not, therefore, how a man looks, how he dresses, nor, yet, his mannerisms, that should receive our serious attention. It is what he says that is true, what he does that is kind and loving and helpful to his fellow men, that constitute his immortal qualities. So it is for us today, in this hour, to have with us, in thought, the real Lincoln or, rather, that which is real and true and enduring about him, just to the extent that we are able to apprehend and appreciate the eternal qualities of his character.

The true estimate of a great life may not be formed by consideration of the merely historical aspect of that life. It is, however, helpful to study the biographies of great men sufficiently to grasp the higher meaning which these life records hold for us. From the words, the deeds, the example of great and good men, we learn useful lessons which, if applied to our daily experience, make us better

men and women, kinder friends and neighbors, more useful and patriotic citizens. From Lincoln's biographers—John Hay, Frederic Trevor Hill, Richard Watson Gilder, and others—we learn that he was humble, honest, faithful, just, strong, tender, loving, patient and meek. Truly Christ-like attributes, these! Yes, and that is why, as the receding years show his character more in its true perspective, and as the dissolving mists of personal bias, or prejudice, enable us to better focus our mental vision, Abraham Lincoln will tower above the meaner men of recent and remote years as one of the greatest figures in history.

Lincoln was not commonly regarded by the people of his day as being a Christian, and, in the sense that he could not subscribe to the popular theological dogma of his time, it is probably true that he was not a professed Christian. However, by us, today, he is seen to have possessed and exercised, to a remarkable degree, most of the Christian virtues; and the Master-Christian said, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

It is truly said that great moral courage and, sometimes, great physical courage are found in those who have what is known as "tender hearts." The English poet sang:

"The bravest, are the tenderest,
The loving, are the daring."

We know that Abraham Lincoln was brave. Let us see whether he was also tender. It is related that when he was "riding the circuit" as a country lawyer, he, with a party of other men, was passing along a country road on horse back. A fast-approaching rainstorm was preceded by a high wind. Noticing by the roadside a meadow lark apparently in great distress, Lincoln dismounted in order to ascertain the cause of her trouble. He was warned by his traveling companions that if he stopped he would be caught by the rainstorm before he reached town. Not heeding their warning nor their ridicule of his "softheartedness," he began an investigation which resulted in the discovery that a gust of wind had dislodged

the meadow lark's nest and "spilled" the brood of baby larks. He carefully righted the nest and gently replaced the little birds, to the evident joy of their mother. He then went on his way, alone, reaching his destination in a drenched condition. The other men who had gone on ahead met him with gibes and jests, but he replied that he could not have been happy unless he had tried to help the mother bird and her little ones. This was but prophetic of the tenderness and mercy with which he handled the case of a certain human mother and son during the dark hours of the civil war.

To assure ourselves that Lincoln was meek and humble, we have only to recall that his favorite poem was said to have been the one by William Knox, which begins, "Oh! why should the spirit of mortal be proud." We may also recall his own poor opinion of the address made by him at the dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg; an address which afterwards came to be regarded as one of the masterpieces of English.

Of Lincoln's firmness, faithfulness and courage during the uncertain periods of the rebellion, of his patience and wisdom in dealing with warring politicians and wrangling military officers, we have undoubted evidence.

Lincoln possessed the saving grace of humor, but the more dominant tone of his nature was pathos. What could be more pathetic than his effort to prevent the Civil War and hold the North and South together when uttering in his first inaugural this wonderful appeal to his countrymen's sense of responsibility:

"My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and well upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time. If there be an object to hurry any of you in hot haste to a step which you would never take deliberately, that object will be frustrated by taking time; but no good object can be frustrated by it. Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust in the best way all our present diffi-

culty. In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen and not in mine, are the momentous issues of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to 'preserve, protect and defend' it.

"I am loath to close. We are not enemies but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break the bonds of affection. The mystic cords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

To my sense, no more pathetic words than these ever fell from the lips of man unless it be those of Jesus, when looking down on Jerusalem, he cried, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I

have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

On leaving Springfield for Washington to take up the reins of government, standing, as it were, on the brink of eternity, looking into the dim, unknown future, he bade his friends good-bye and assured them of his trust in a supreme, governing power, to whom he referred as "the God who can go with me and remain with you," thus voicing his belief in the omnipotence and omnipresence of God.

Among the strongest characteristics of Lincoln were justice and equity. In one epigrammatic sentence, he laid down a valuable precept for just and equitable relations between individuals, churches, communities and states when he said, "In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity."

Mere politicians, with their selfish schemes, may come and go "like bubbles on a river," but the genuine statesman and his unselfish life work "will abide forever." The super-

ficially brilliant person appears for a brief space above the horizon of his day, and then, like a rushing comet, plunges swiftly into the darkness of obscurity. The man of sterling character remains a perpetual inspiration to posterity.

Mrs. Eddy, the discoverer and founder of Christian Science, has said in her "Miscellaneous Writings": "The lives of great men and women are miracles of patience and perseverance. Every luminary in the constellation of human greatness, like the stars, comes out in the darkness to shine with the reflected light of God." To no one do these words apply with more truth than to Abraham Lincoln, unless it be to their author. Even as Lincoln was called of God in the hour of a nation's need to be the emancipator of his brothers from intolerable conditions of physical and political bondage, so Mary Baker Eddy was called of God to bring a higher sense of freedom to mankind. For more than forty years, the revered Leader of the Christian Science movement has toiled patiently and,

thank God, successfully, to free her fellowmen from the bondage of sickness and sin. We who are her followers may, perhaps, better than those who are without the knowledge of Christian Science, understand and apply to our present experience these immortal words from the Gettysburg address of Abraham Lincoln:

“The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Let us go forth from here today imbued with the earnest desire to labor for the establishment on earth of God's government of His people by His Christ. Let us "here highly resolve" that this government of divine Good "shall not perish," but shall endure until "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

CHAS. A. PEARSON
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PRACTITIONER

Phone **3114** | Scripps Bldg.
Main | San Diego, Cal.

LINCOLN'S GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

FOURSCORE and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here; but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

